

## **The King Island World War 2 War Service Fund**

During World War 2, Hayden (Dave) Birrell received a Comfort Package or a Money Order from the King Island (Tasmania) War Service Fund, and then corresponded with the Fund.

In August 1940, the Island Fund was formally approved to operate independently from the State of Tasmania. It was run by a group of volunteers, led by Mr John (Jack) Marshall. John was an ex WW1 soldier, also the President of the local Returned Sailors, Soldiers and Airmen Imperial League of Australia (RSSAILA), founded on King Island in 1919. This is now known as the Returned and Services League (RSL) and the King Island RSL Sub branch is still in operation.

The fund distributed packages to locals who had enlisted and other people who had no connection with King Island. As a mark of respect 139 service personnel wrote letters of thanks, totaling approximately 530 letters – they form the basis of the collection. Further information on the Fund and its operation can be found on the Community Page.

The challenges for a service person during World War 2 to write a letter was to firstly find the inclination (often directly related to their mental condition due to combat), time, paper, a writing implement and a place under cover. Occasionally a letter was typed and the paper ranged from high quality to loose scraps, and as the war progressed supplies dwindled. With letterhead paper, naming a unit or organisation, do not assume that was where the person was when writing. Paper was borrowed and passed on to mates. Occasionally, a Telegram was sent where the emphasis was on brevity as each word added more to the cost.

The standard of writing is directly related to the standard of education and sometimes a friend or a Chaplain would write a letter on a person's behalf. Many of the letters were addressed to Mr Marshall (or just Jack), his wife, a member of the voluntary committee, or the RSSAILA. Some letters are very brief while others are detailed and mention other people, or events they have witnessed. The Marshall's also lost their son John while on Active Service, and some writers asked about John or acknowledged his death to the family.

For most of the war, letters were subject to censorship and this is often observed in a cutout section on a page – if the other side was written on it was also deleted. Many letters have the initials or the signature of the person who checked them prior to posting.

What follows is a scan of the original letter and a typed transcript, based on the original. Grammar or spelling has not been changed or corrected, and if more than one letter was written they follow in date order. Some of the original letters, although stored correctly, are very faint and fragile, but all have been included along with undated letters. They are perhaps the only surviving documents written by this person.

Dave wrote his only letter on 1 November 1942 and his Army File records that he was in the Perth area at the time.

VX 65 339

Sdr H. A. Sirell

B. H. Q

29<sup>th</sup> Battery

10<sup>th</sup> Aust. Field Regt.

H. I. F. Australia

1/11/1943

Dear Mr Marshall,

Just a note to  
thank you and the H. I. War Services  
Land Committee for the Carden  
order you sent to me. Believe  
me when I say it was very  
acceptable and appreciated.

The life in  
general is very good with me  
and we are in a decent spot.  
Mr McLean or Norm Sharp can  
tell you where I am. I have  
had a good look around  
the country and have enjoyed  
every bit of it.

We have done some pretty  
hard work since being over  
here and the general opinion  
with the boys is, to have a go  
which I don't think will  
be so very long now.

I am the Q.M. at present so have  
to keep moving as there is  
plenty to do, but the time goes  
much faster when you are  
moving about.

I still receive some  
news of H. & from M<sup>r</sup> M<sup>c</sup>Lean  
and Norm and I like to keep  
in touch with the Island.

Once again thanking  
you I will close

With kindest regards  
to M<sup>r</sup> Marshall & family

Jane Dinnell

JD

VX65339  
Bdr H.D. Birrell  
B.H.Q  
39<sup>th</sup> Battery  
10<sup>th</sup> Aust. Field Regt.  
A.I.F. Australia  
1/11/1942

Dear Mr Marshall,

Just a note to thank you and the K.I. War Service Fund Committee for the Canteen order you sent to me. Believe me when I say it was very acceptable and appreciated.

The life in general is very good with me and we are in a decent spot. Mr McLean or Norm Sharp can tell you where I am. I have had a good look around the country and have enjoyed every bit of it.

We have done some pretty hard work since being over here and the general opinion with the boys is, to have a go which I don't think will be so very long now.

I am the Q.M. at present so have to keep moving as there is plenty to do, but the time goes much faster when you are moving about.

I still receive some news of K.I. from Mr McLean and Norm and I like to keep in touch with the island.

Once again thanking you I will close

With kindest regards to Mrs Marshall & family

Dave Birrell